
A S H O R T
A C C O U N T
O F T H E

Several Kinds of SOCIETIES, set up of
late Years, for-carrying on the Reformation
of Manners, and for the Propagation of
Christian Knowledge.

AFTER that the Virtuous Part of *England* had long complain'd of the infamous Clubbs of *Atheists*, *Deists*, and *Socinians*, who, for many Years past, have Labour'd to set up the pretended Oracles of misguided Reason, against the undoubted Oracles of God; too many of whom, by their scandalous Lives, most agreeable to their Principles, have endeavour'd to destroy in themselves, and others, all Notions of Divine Things, and of the differences of Good and Evil; it was thought necessary, by divers serious Persons of the *Church of England*, That the *Children of Light* should endeavour to be as Wise as they; and, by forming themselves into *Societies*, should assist one another in their most Holy Faith, and a Practice agreeable thereto.

These and the like Considerations, brought together a considerable Number of such Pious Persons (about Twenty Years since) who met often, to Pray, Sing Psalms, and Read the Holy Scriptures together; and to Reprove, Exhort, and Edifice one another, by their Religious Conferences; and their Number hath been daily so encreased, that they make, at present, about Thirty Nine *Societies*, in and about *London* and *Westminster*; and their Example hath been follow'd, by Devout Persons, in divers other Parts of this Nation, and in *Ireland*, especially in *Dublin*, where there are about Ten of these *Societies*, supported by the Reverend Bishops and Inferiour Clergy there: These *Societies*, and their Methods and Orders, were enquir'd into, and approv'd by our late Queen of Blessed Memory, and the late Excellent Archbishop *Tillotson*, and are greatly esteem'd by several Most Reverend and Right Reverend Bishops, who have made the same Enquiry: And these are the *Societies* which are particularly call'd, *THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES*, whose Rise, Progress, and Charitable Designs, are Describ'd and Recommended, in a Pious Discourse, by the Reverend Mr. *Woodward*.

But

But the Private Devotions, and Exemplary Lives, of the Members of these *Societies*, were not sufficient to stop the Torrent of Vice, which had broken down all the Banks of Reason and Religion; and therefore, about Ten Years since, Five or Six private Gentlemen (*Members of the Church of England*) Considering that the higher the Tide of Wickedness was, the more need there was of opposing it; they resolved to Associate themselves, to make their utmost Efforts for promoting the Execution of the Laws against *Vice* and *Immorality*, and the suppressing of them by adviseable Methods: And this Design, tho' at first violently oppos'd by the Champions and Advocates of Debauchery, yet, by the Divine Assistance, the Patronage of His Most Sacred Majesty, and His late Most Gracious Queen, the Countenance of the Clergy of the greatest Figure in the *Church*, particularly of His Grace the Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*, by his Circular Letter, and the Zeal and Industry of the Persons engag'd therein, hath prosper'd to a Degree, Exceedingly Great, beyond what Humane Wisdom did, or could expect; for this Design Encountring no Man's honest Advantage, no ways intermeddling in Matters of Controversie, being directed by Men of considerable Rank and Fortune, as *Members of Parliament*, *Justices of the Peace*, *Lawyers*, and *Eminent Citizens*; and who are also of the clearest Character; and the Executive Part manag'd by such who have refus'd even that part of the Forfeitures, on Convictions, which the Law allows to Informers, least they should seem to aim at *Their own private Advantage*; many Virtuous People of the too various Denominations of *Protestants* amongst us, have readily agreed to joyn Hearts and Purse in the Prosecution thereof; and this Union of Hearts and Affections, in things so agreeable to all, who deserve the Name of *Protestants*, of *Christians*, of *Englishmen*, or even of *Men*, hath been of great use, to remove the Prejudices, which many had taken up, against *The Establish'd Church*, and against one another; and hath laid a Foundation of that Union, which may be a probable means of putting an end to Schisms and Divisions, of restoring the Primitive Discipline in the *Church*, and of teaching *England* to *Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace*.

It is by the Endeavours of this *Society* (assisted by the *Religious Societies* aforesaid) and divers others since form'd, and acting under the Influence of it, that more than Twenty Thousand Persons have been Convicted for *Swearing*, *Cursing*, or *Prophanation of the Lord's-Day*, in and about the Cities of *London* and *Westminster*; and many of them, at least outwardly, Reformed thereby; and the Prosecutions have been manag'd with so much Tenderness and Christian Charity, that no just Cause of Complaint has ever yet appear'd against them; and by the Endeavours of one of these *Societies* alone, Three Thousand lewd and disorderly Persons have been Punish'd within the same Limits: And 'tis of these *Societies*, and their Rise, Progress and Success, that the World has had an Account, in a Book, Entitul'd, *An Account of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners in England and Ireland; with a Perswasion to Persons of all Ranks to be zealous and diligent in promoting the Execution of the Laws against Prophaness and Debauchery, for effecting a National Reformation: Publish'd with the Approbation of a considerable Number of Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and of the Honourable Judges of both Kingdoms.*

But altho' the Success of these *Societies* was already very great, and tho' it should be still more and more abundant, there seem'd yet something more that was needful to be done *against Satan's Kingdom, and to promote the Kingdom of Jesus Christ*. The meeting together for mutual Edification, in *Religious Societies*, is a probable means of making good Men better; and the Vigilance of *Societies*, for *Reformation of Manners*, is likely, not only to keep ill Men from growing worse, but to Convert and Amend them: But for the lasting Establishment of our holy Faith, and the spreading of it in the World, there is a visible Necessity of some special Care to be taken for the breeding up of Children in Virtue and true Religion, for the reclaiming of those who Err in the Fundamentals of *Christianity*, and for encouraging the Propagation of the Gospel in our *Plantations*.

This Consideration mov'd some Persons of *Honour and Quality*, who had a true Zeal for the Glory of God, the Salvation of their Brethren, and the Reputation of our *Mother-Church*, to Unite themselves into a *Society, for the promoting of Christian Knowledge* both at Home and Abroad; and they apply'd themselves to form Methods, and to find out means of accomplishing so glorious an Undertaking; regulating themselves always by the *Ecclesiastical Constitutions*, as the *Societies for Reformation* do themselves by the *Temporal Laws* of England. And thus about March, Anno 1698, began the *Society for promoting of Christian Knowledge*, which has, since that time, been daily encreased, by the Accession of many worthy Persons, who were desirous to be instrumental in so Excellent a Design; so that at present it consists of a considerable Number of Persons of Quality and Estates, Bishops, Eminent Clergymen, Lawyers, &c. besides their Correspondents which are carrying on the same Work in all the Counties of England and Wales, and in the *Plantations beyond the Seas*.

This *Society* meets Weekly to deliberate about what is Expedient for the carrying on of those Pious Ends for which they United; and they have already made a Progress beyond what could reasonably have been hoped for in so short a time. They have (by their own Subscriptions, and others which they have procur'd) bought great Numbers of Useful Books, for the furnishing of the *Plantations* with *Parochial Libraries*, to invite Worthy Clergymen to those Parts; by whose Labours, the *Christians*, who are there, may be Edify'd, and the Gospel Propagated among the *Unbelievers*.

They have dispersed great Numbers of good Books for the Instructing of poor Families in the true Principles of the *Christian Religion*. They are using means for the providing *Catechetical-Libraries* in the smaller Parishes, to enable the Inferiour Clergy the better to perform their Duty of *Catechizing*, according to the LIXth Canon, and the greater Parishes with *Lending-Libraries*, which will be of great use to the Poorer Clergy, to assist them in the more successful opposing of Errors and Heresies. And they have more particularly apply'd themselves to the setting up of *Schools* for the Education of *Poor Children*, many of which are Erected, and are now Erecting in the Country: In and about *London* and *Westminster*, there are already set up about Twenty of them, in which near a Thousand *Poor Children*, of both Sexes, are taught to Read the Bible, and to repeat and understand the *Church Catechism*;

chism; and the Boys are besides taught to Write and Cast Account, to fit them for Trades, and the Girls to Knit, Work with their Needle, &c. to make them good Servants in others Families, or good Wives and Mothers in their own; and by this means we have a fair prospect of a great Reformation of the poorer sort (who are now so much Corrupted) by the bringing up of such Numbers of them Piously, in a true conformity to the Church, and in ways that lead them to be serviceable to the Publick.

It is not doubted, but that all true Lovers of the *Church of England*, to whom this Account shall come, will, with their Prayers, Countenance; and Assistance, joyn in these Pious Endeavours, by which so much Good may be done to the World, and so much Honour redound to our Holy Religion and the Establish'd Church, that our Enemies may have no room to charge us with the betraying the Interest of our Church, by Supinity or Negligence, or with Coldness in promoting true Piety and Religion at Home, or in spreading it Abroad in the remoter part of the Earth: And we need not doubt but these blessed Designs will gain Credit to this Church, both at Home and Abroad; and help to continue it, as it hath constantly been, since the *Reformation*, the Bulwark of the *Protestant* Religion.

F I N I S.

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